



PUBLIC HEARING
Bill 16-734
The "Library Transformation Act of 2006"

THURSDAY, JUNE 15, 2006

10:00 AM

Council Committee on
Education, Libraries and Recreation

TESTIMONY

*District of Columbia Public Library
John Hill, President of the Library Board of Trustees*

- Good morning Councilmember Patterson and other Council members of the Committee on Education, Libraries and Recreation. My name is John Hill and I am the President of the Library Board of Trustees.
- I want to begin today by thanking you for your support of the Library Transformations Initiative by participating in the Mayor's Task Force and by supporting Library legislative initiatives that will have a positive impact on providing quality services to our citizens for years to come.
- I would also like to formally introduce our new library director, Ginnie Cooper. We could not be more thrilled to have such a talented, dedicated, and visionary leader who will soon take the helm of our system. She successfully transformed public libraries—in places such as Alameda County in California and Portland, Oregon—in ways that we can only talk about in the abstract. And once she accepted this position, library directors from across the country called to congratulate us on luring her away from the Brooklyn Public Library System.

- Before Ms. Cooper introduces herself, I want to give you the board's candid assessment of the state of our libraries today and what we, as Washingtonians, deserve to have in the future.
- All it takes is a visit to one of our neighborhood branches or our central library to see that our library system is badly broken. Slashed budgets starting with the Control Board, where I served, contributed greatly to its erosion. Programmatic needs have also changed quite substantially over the past 20 years. Increased demand for literacy services, computers and computer-based programs, and increased demand to support English language learners are just a few examples. We need to re-design a new central library from the inside out—with programs that dictate building design.
- DC however, is by no means the first city confronted with underutilized, low performing libraries. Many cities across the country at one time or another, reached a low point before galvanizing support for profound organizational and systemic change. When we traveled to successful library systems across the country, we learned that almost all cities faced initial skepticism, if not opposition, for investing in a new central library. Yet these cities stayed on course, demonstrating an unwavering commitment to lift up and support its residents. The dividends have been quite phenomenal.
- I will now show some images of central libraries across the country to demonstrate what we should expect of ourselves. These cities had big ideas and refused to settle for mediocrity or even second-class libraries. It is time for all of us to think – and act – big again and finally claim what we all deserve.
- [slide] Starting with Nashville which decided on a more neoclassical architecture style than the other libraries you will see.
- [Slide] Inside, one of their most successful programs is child education and entertainment. This started with the collection of over 250 marionettes. With performing artists on staff, and a new children's theatre, over 5,000 kids and parents come to watch theater

every month. That's 5,000 people coming into the downtown specifically for this venue. But this is not just children's entertainment, Nashville, creatively integrated a pre-literacy program as part of the puppet shows—shows that are as popular as ever and are supported by private funding.

- [Slide] Nashville's library is also famous for its Civic Rights room and collection, as you see here it chronicles the role Nashville has played in the civil rights struggle. Just imagine the rich resources we have in our Washingtonian Collection that could attract and education so many more about our unique and rich heritage.
- [slide] Let's move on to Los Angeles. Their library is now visited by more than 14 million people a year. Considering that 18 million tourists come to Washington, DC every year, this tells us just how powerful libraries can be in contributing to the vibrancy of a city. Patrons come to this library to access over 2 million books and over 7,000 newspapers worldwide.
- [slide] Here are a few images of their popular teen center. This area provides specific magazines and hot topic books just for them. Teens were involved in designing the space to meet their needs.
- [slide] And, while they have over 17,000 free public programs, their 235-seat auditorium was particularly impressive. Book readings, a popular speaker series, and classical music concerts continue to lure people into the downtown.
- [slide] This is Seattle's central library, which was designed by Rem Koolhaas – one of the world's prominent architects today. While it is one of the most iconic buildings in Seattle's downtown, this library was actually designed from the inside out. Seattle wanted to create series of staggered and even partial floors connected by escalators and ramps.
- [Slide] This created intimate programmed spaces with an 'airy' quality and spectacular views throughout the building.

- [slide] Here is the Phoenix Central library.
- [Slide] Phoenix is known to have programmed one of the country's best teen centers – called Teen Central. Look at how these spaces were designed just for that age group. Anywhere between 150 and 300 teenagers come and use Teen Central a day. Specific books, cds and dvds, magazines, and comics have been selected just for their age group. One of their popular programs include the “Read What You Want Book Club”, where teens discuss whatever they are reading at the moment.
- [Slide] Moving to Denver, this building was designed by Michael Graves. He has particularly enjoyed using various colors and geometric shapes as buildings are conceptualized. As you can see, he used this style here.
- [Slide] Now inside, this is where the Western History Collection is located. It is one of the country's most complete collections on western U.S. history. It is heavily used for research as well as special events such as rare book auctions and fundraising activities.
- [slide] And finally Salt Lake City.
- [slide] Here are just a few images of their spaces. There are intimate spaces where you get lost in academic pursuits, a wonderful conference center on the ground floor and a roof top patio and garden to enjoy views of the mountain ranges surrounding Salt Lake City.
- I felt it was important to share these images to help articulate what is possible and what is possible in our city. These examples clearly demonstrate how many cities across the country have creatively programmed and designed their great central libraries.
- [Slide] Now it's our turn to think and plan big by designing the best programs and building a new MLK Library worthy [the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the citizens of the District of Columbia.](#)

- Which takes me to the last point I want to make. I recognize that some residents have expressed concern about losing the history and strong symbolism of Martin Luther King, Jr. if we move to a new building. Martin Luther King, Jr. himself said that “learning is the most vital and indispensable element to freedom.” I strongly believe that rather than leave his name on a building that is no longer conducive to learning, it is better to place his name on a new library that connects our residents to learning and literacy—and is inviting to all citizens.